

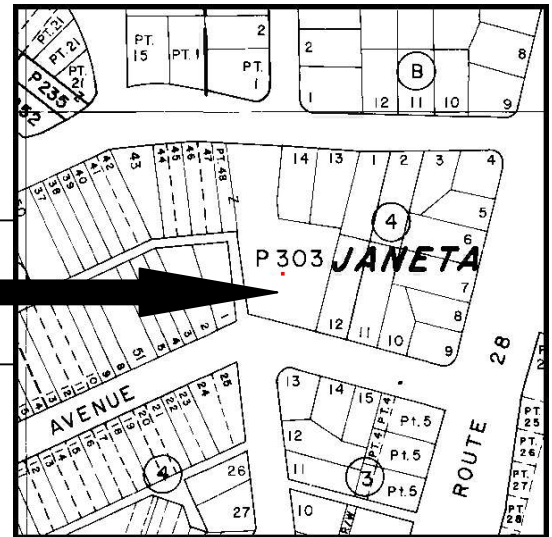
**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
HISTORIC DESIGNATION EVALUATION**

**STAFF ANALYSIS
550 Reading Avenue**

**August 20, 2002
MEETING NO. 8-02**



550 Reading Avenue



SUBJECT: The John and Addie Maddox House/ Homewood
LOCATION: 550 Reading Avenue, Parcel P303, Map GR42, Block 4, Janeta
SIZE: 36,245 square feet
OWNER: Richard Ellis Smith and Jane O. MacFarlane
MEETING DATE: 7/16/02, continued to 8/20/02

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that 550 Reading Avenue be found eligible for designation as a single site (Landmark) Rockville Historic District in accordance with the adopted criteria.

EVALUATION PROCESS

Notices of the HDC evaluation were sent via first class mail to adjacent and confronting property owners, Citizen's Associations and other interested parties on July 10, 2002. The agenda for the evaluation meeting was also posted on the city's web page and the property was posted.

BACKGROUND

The house at 550 Reading Avenue was nominated for historic designation by the current owners, Richard Smith and Jane O. MacFarlane. The Maryland Historical Trust Historic Site Inventory Form (MHT form) was prepared by consultant Gail Littlefield who stated: Homewood, the property located at 550 Reading Avenue, is significant architecturally, for its landscape, and for its historical associations with the prominent Maddox family and with the growth of Rockville after the coming of the B & O Railroad in 1873. The house is an example of a c.1900 vernacular farmhouse, with additions probably expressing the needs and tastes of its many owners since 1917, when it was sold out of the Maddox family. Although the property has been reduced from the time the house was built, the property still retains its country feel, surrounded by small modern houses on small lots. It retains many fine specimen trees.

The house is a vernacular three-bay by two-bay Gothic-revival style wood frame 2-1/2 -story house. It has a symmetrical front façade, a window in each of the prominent front and two side gables, a front-

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gabled full-width one-story front porch and a one-story projecting bay on the north side. Although a firm date is wanting, the evidence suggests a construction date in the early 1890s.

The Addie and John Maddox House, "Homewood", at 550 Reading Avenue, is located in Block 4 of the Janeta Subdivision of Rockville, adjacent to Rockville Park. Janeta is named for Catherine Jane Harding, who inherited the 156.5 acre Magrath Place tract from her grandfather, Adam Robb. She was the second wife of Dr. Charles J. Maddox, a prominent Rockville physician and citizen. She died in 1897.

After Dr. Maddox's death in 1899, his children divided the Magrath Place property that they had inherited. John Maddox, born in 1852 and the oldest of the children of Dr. Maddox and his first wife, was deeded Block 4 and the north half of Block 3 of Janeta. John Maddox later added two adjacent contiguous lots in Rockville Park (lots 47 and 48, Block 7, facing Baltimore Road) to his homestead. In 1907, John Maddox died, leaving his wife Addie and four children. In his will, he left Homewood to Addie, but the family returned to St. Mary's County following his death. In 1917, Addie Maddox sold Homewood (Janeta Block 4 and north part of Block 3), and the two Rockville Park lots, to Walter S. Thompson. Thompson had already purchased the next three Rockville Park lots adjacent to the Maddoxes in Block 7, for a total of 5 lots.

The property had several owners from 1924 to 1959. In 1953, half of Block 4, Janeta, was subdivided into 12 lots. Montgomery County National Bank sold the remaining property at 550 Reading as foreclosed property at public auction on April 30, 1959. The August Investment Co. bought the northern part of Block 4, Janeta, the five Rockville Park lots, and two more Rockville Park lots (lots 1 and 2, Block 7, also adjacent to Homewood and facing Reading Ave.) The August Investment Co. subdivided the part of Block 4 upon which Homewood sat, creating lots 13 and 14 out of the northeast corner of the tract. Richard Ellis Smith and Jane O. MacFarlane, the current owners, purchased Homewood in 2001.

SUMMARIES OF TESTIMONY ON 550 READING AVENUE:

Mr. Richard Smith, the current owner, stated that he thought the staff report was thorough, but he wanted to correct the pronunciation of Janeta and add some information. He said that Dr. Charles Maddox had named the area after his wife, and it should be pronounced JAN-EEE-TA. Mr. Smith said that there is evidence that the house was not built by a professional builder, such as the random spacing of the rafters. He said that the foundation is mortar and stone and was built to only accommodate a crawl space. A cellar was later excavated and it has dirt walls and a partial dirt floor. Mr. Smith said that the one-over-one windows are only on a portion of the first story which may have been a porch and which now contains a half bath and a laundry.

Mr. Smith stated that he and his wife are in favor of designation and believe that the property meets the criteria. They want to improve the house condition with tax credits and other opportunities that would be available to them through historic designation. He said that he grew up in a c.1890 house in Pennsylvania and that his wife spent time in her grandparents' old house as a child and they both had an interest in old houses. He said that the house was featured on the House and Garden channel in January 2001 while the previous owners were restoring it.

Suzanne Fisher, representing Peerless Rockville, stated that Peerless Rockville supports the nomination for historic designation of this property. She said that the property, with its mature trees, reminds one of

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earlier times and it meets the architectural/design and historic/cultural criteria. Ms. Fisher said that the house was a site for Peerless Rockville's Progressive Dinner this year and that it is a hidden gem.

No one spoke in opposition to designation. No additional comments were submitted prior to the closing of the record at the close of business on August 1, 2002.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

Staff concurs with the nominators and letter of support from Peerless Rockville that 550 Reading Avenue meets the criteria for designation as a single site local historic district by the City of Rockville. Staff found that it is significant to the City of Rockville in that it was the home of the Dr. John Maddox Family and a significant part of the history and development of the Janeta Subdivision. The property demonstrates the transition of Rockville from an agricultural town to a suburban railroad town and the subsequent subdivision of farm properties near the railroad into building lots. It is a typical example of a prosperous late 19th Century house and probably the first original house in Janeta.